







onfident" and "Swagger" ought to have been the two middle names of the noted celebrity chef Geoffrey Zakarian. One can only assume that after more than thirty years as a stalwart of the upper echelons of the fine food industry that, that sort of overwhelming self-confidence is to be expected I suppose. That bravado was certainly on full display as we sat to speak from his eponymous landmark flagship the imposing Lambs Club restaurant in the heart of NewYork City aka Times Square recently.

The Massachusetts raised chef has unquestionably made his mark as one of America's leading chef restaurateurs known for pairing his classic training and techniques with a seemingly relentless urge to rule and conquer the world of hospitality. He has created some of America's noted eateries from- The 44 at The Royalton to the Blue Door at the Delano, Miami Beach to Patroon in New York City. Today, with the dynamic tandem he has forged with his partner and wife Margaret, they continue to build on new properties while maintaining the highest standards for his many well established salons such as the aforementioned The Lambs Club, Georgie and The Garden Bar at the Montage Beverly Hills, the Water Club at Borgata, or the National in Greenwich, Connecticut. This 2017, Zakarian Hospitality will open Point Royal, a fun coastal American restaurant and bar, and its fast casual extension, Counter Point at the Diplomat Beach Resort in Hollywood, Florida. Add to that, of course, his high-profile presence on Food Network's Chopped, Cooks vs. Cons, and The Kitchen which all assure that Geoffrey Zakarian will be a constant and relevant media presence for seasons to come. Philanthropy is also at the top of Geoffrey and Margaret's to do list as they are hosting Our Town's Art of Food event at Sotheby's on February 4 to benefit City Harvest where 20 esteemed chefs create masterpieces inspired by artwork for one extraordinary and mouthwatering evening.

GEORGE WAYNE - Toque to me Chef Zakarian! Did you ever know that Gwynnie Paltrow once famously said—"I would rather smoke crack than eat cheese from a tin!".

GEOFFREY ZAKARIAN - Well, I have never done either but I like where she is going with that. It's about doing things correctly, and she is very smart. She is a big shot and she is known for saying things in a sort of spectacular fashion. I like Gwyneth.

GW- Are you and your wife Margaret [sitting

beside him] the sort of fastidious foodies who only scramble organic, pastured eggs for breakfast and have liquefied kale for the morning juice? What's a typical breakfast like for the Zakarian family?

GZ- No, we are not like that all actually. We have three young kids and we do breakfast every single morning. Madeline, Anna and George are seven, five and two-years-old and we ask them every night before they go to bed what they want for breakfast the next morning, and so every morning we cook a big feast for them. For me breakfast is the most important thing. We make omelettes, and frittata, avocado toast. Whatever they ask for Daddy makes for them. And breakfast is every morning at 6:30 am sharp.

GW- Which is more IN this season...puntarelle or baby parsnip?

GZ- Well, puntarelle is really not in season now, but the way the business has been evolving you can get any product even though it is not in season. So for instance, puntarelle is not in season now, but somewhere in the world there is Summer, so for instance, Argentina where they grow great puntarelle, it is in season. So you can pretty much now get anything you want at any time, if you are willing to pay for it. I tend to try and find produce that is pretty much local because that makes much more sense.

GW- I ask that question not knowing even what puntarelle is.

GZ-Puntarelle is a really beautiful and bitter chicory, kind of like a chick pea that Italians [especially] love. Puntarelle as a dressing with some bracing vinaigrette over anchovies. It's a big deal for them.

GW- Have you ever eaten bison?

GZ- I have. And bison is a great, relatively inexpensive meat that is low in fat and cholesterol. It tastes kind of like venison but a bit more dry. I will also add, that it is not one of my favorite animals to eat,

GW- What is the strangest, tastiest food you have ever eaten?

GZ- Well, I have this show called "Chopped" where we eat everything. Contestants get four items and it could be anything from lamb testicles to chicken feet, the craziest stuff and they have to make a tasty meal out of it. "Chopped" is a crazy show. So I have to eat a lot of crappy shit [sometimes] on that

show. It happens. I have eaten cockroaches on "Chopped". In Mexico, cockroaches are a big protein source. Cockroach powder is huge in Mexico.

GW- You are one of America's leading culinary swamis. The man known as "the original Iron Chef". Give us a quick precis of this man of Armenian heritage. Talk a bit about where this acute passion for food first began?

GZ- That's an easy question because I was born into an environment where food was my family's life passion. Mum, Dad, aunts and uncles – all Armenian and they love food. Food is everything in such families and my parents cooked every meal I ever had growing up. By the age of three, I was already a food snob. We were poor, but I ate like a king everyday of the week.

GW- When did you first think that you could make a career out of food?

GZ- Late in life George, it was late. I was going to get an MBA in Economics at the University of Chicago after my undergraduate degree at the University of Massachusetts and then I went to France for three months because I had never been and I fell in love with the food and culture of France and I said – "Wow!" I want to do this. So I scrapped the MBA and went to study at the CIA [Culinary Institute of America]. And two years later I was working at Le Cirque which [at the time] was the best French restaurant in the country.

GW- And your first job at Le Cirque was what?

GZ- I was a souffle chef at Le Cirque. Those early days were something else. I just soaked up all the creative energy in that kitchen. It was unbelievable. I came to work early every day and I was always the last to leave. I didn't want to leave. I just loved it so much. I soaked it all in—everybody's energy, and picked everyone's brain and just loved it all. I started it in the souffle department and I wasn't even getting paid at the time. I was just happy to be working with Chef Alain Sailhac.

GW- You spent six years at Le Cirque and then...

GZ- I left to become the Chef-de-Cuisine at the newly then renovated and re-launched21 Club. I was there for 2 1/2 years and then I left to go and open The Restaurant 44 at the Royalton Hotel.

GW- And that, as far as I am concerned, was the moment that catapulted your career. When Ian Schrager asked you to create The Restaurant 44 at The Royalton. Your life truly changed forever.

GZ- Jeffrey Chodorow held the lease and I was there helping and after he went to jail I then took over the lease with Bryan McNally and we became partners. I stayed there for seven years and in between we went down an opened The Blue Door at the Delano in March of 1995.

GW- Aaah,,, the iconic restaurant at the Delano which back in its heyday was America's supreme face-place.

GZ– It was amazing..yes it was. Ian Schrager not only created the original boutique hotel but he also re-created Miami Beach and that began with The Delano.

GW- Working with a great visionary like Ian Schrager....

GZ–Just incredible! We had 1,100 people clamoring to get into that restaurant on the very first day we were open for business. It was just gorgeous and sexy and the world had never seen anything like it

GW- What was that like working with Ian?

GZ- Well, that's all I did-work! He is a lunatic like I am but he is a visionary and a complete perfectionist. I learnt that from Ian and Sirio Maccioni...it's all about the details. I mean, Ian used to complain about the hot chocolate if it wasn't done just right!

GW- Would you say Ian Schrager was integral to your trajectory?

GZ- He wasn't the only one. The first was Alain Sailhac, then Daniel Boulud and yes Ian Schrager.

GW- We are doing this interview right here at what is Anna Wintour's favorite booth at the gorgeous Lambs Club. This used to be "the Conde Nast commissary" before The "Conde Nasties" all moved down to One World Trade Center. Now, today their new commissary is the Odeon. You must miss the old Conde Nast crowd.

GZ-They still come here. The Conde crowd still comes back. Now it's become the home of the HBO crowd.

GW- Anna still comes and what does she eat?

GZ-People think that Anna Wintour doesn't eat





but she eats. She is a real eater. She loves her hamburgers and steaks. And she also loves her avocado toast. She loves her rare burgers and mashed potatoes.

GW-You certainly have your plate full what with the many restaurants from NYC to Connecticut to Beverly Hills. Where do you want to set up shop next? Anguilla? Anguilla is the-next-St. Barths and a serious foodie haven! Zakarian Hospitality ought to consider Anguilla for a future outpost.

GZ- I have a new property opening in Hollywood, Florida at The Diplomat Beach Resort but if you want to help us with Anguilla, by all means. I love Anguilla.

GW- But how do you maintain the purity of your brand when you have so many satellites of your brand. How can you really manage quality and control. And all these TV shows!

GZ-I have been a chef for almost thirty years and TV found me. It came on my plate and it has been very good for us.

GW- Yes, food show culture which is so huge now and which you are very much a part of...

GZ- And it is very educational.

GW- Yes and at that the same time you have so many restaurants all over America and more coming. How do you manage? How can all this not dilute your brand? How do you manage to keep all this in check?

GZ- There are many others who have fifty, sixty restaurants. We don't have that. We do restaurants that we think matter and are important. We have a great team in place. Margaret and I work in tandem and we spend quality time keeping it all in check and I want more. I have swag bro.

GW- You always did. What is exciting you for 2017?

GZ- We have the new property in Florida and I

am developing something exciting for the Upper East Side. I think that is a neighborhood that needs re-discovering again, so I want to do something amazing on the Upper East Side.

GW- I like that.

GZ- Nobody is up there and I want to do something fresh on the Upper East Side. I am very bullish on New York.

GW-Last question...sesame rye or sesame tahini... the preferred artisanal bread?

GZ- Sesame tahini. I'm Armenian after all!

GW-Awesome! Thank you for your time and this conversation. And as Padma Lakshmi would so breathlessly bray on her foodie TV show- "You can pack your knives and go". Thank you Chef Zakarian! ◆



resident.com | 55